DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 078 328 CG 008 092

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TITLE The Non-Membership Reference Group and Ego.
PUB DATE May 73
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Midwest Sociological Society meeting (May 3-5, 1973, Milwaukee, Wisconsin)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Group Behavior; *Group Dynamics; Group Experience; *Group Membership; *Group Norms; Group Relations; *Groups; Literature Reviews; Orientation; Perception; Self Concept; Social Influences; *Socialization

ABSTRACT

This research essentially presents an overview, historically and contemporarily, of the social-psychological concept of the reference group (or "other"), including theoretical and empirical literature reviews. Basic problems of definition and conceptual confusion are discussed. Concepts such as relative deprivation, anticipatory socialization, normative types, and extraneous variables involved in researching the reference non-membership group concept are also dealt with and suggestions made for future research. Rather specific, extensive treatment is given to Merton's perspectives and conceptual formulations regarding perception and reference groups. Merton's theory that non-members do not constitute a single homogeneous social category is extensively discussed in light of three variables: (1) eligibility-whether or not an individual is eligible to become a member; (2) orientation-how an individual views the group, i.e., positively, negatively or indifferently; and (3) membership-whether or not the non-member is oriented toward a closed or open group. References are included. (Author)

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THE NON-MEMBERSHIP REFERENCE GROUP AND EGO

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We are pushed to conform on every side, in the places where we spend most of the hours of the day. In regard to an individual and his various encounters and resulting patterns of social interaction, it is not simply that the influential criteria that come to bear on an individual are external, but rather that the criteria are usually not chosen by the person himself but are brought to bear upon him by others.[1] The conforming person is often the "good" person whose primary mode of existence is rooted in others; the "other" becomes the center of an individual's world. We continue to use labels to stereotype ourselves and others. We seem to have made identification with something the basis for behavior and interaction.

Identifications fix the person in society and define him by categories, comparisons, and evaluations, which may in a very real sense alienate the person from others and from the person himself. Identifications are forms of role-playing and perhaps ways of wearing different masks that bear little relationship to persons as individuals. Because it appears to be very easy to become almost totally influenced by others, there seems to be something like a consequent price to pay in loss of self-esteem and as a result this causes difficulties in self-conceptions.

The point in the preceding paragraph is that perhaps the non-membership group serves an important function in a complex society. The membership groups of an individual are constantly making formal

and informal demands, restrictions, identifications, etc., on the individual and it cannot be doubted that every individual is a member of a group, or groups, many times whether he wants to be or not. One of the aspects of the non-membership group is that it appears to be largely a voluntary committment on the part of an individual. It is one of this writer's speculations that many people may subscribe to various non-membership groups as a reaction to their particular situations. Although perhaps we are becoming too psychological in this respect, one of the functions of non-membership groups may be to serve as a means of "escape" from the omni-presence of normal day-to-day existence. It would seem that, in most cases, non-membership groups are positive forces, whereas a membership group appears to be able to become positive or negative. Perhaps an individual's reluctance to join into voluntary associations (i.e., Wright's and Hyman's 1957 article on membership in voluntary associations as gathered from opinion polls) is an indication of the more overall positive aspects of the non-memb rship group. Of course, real conflict may occur between and within both membership and non-membership groups. A suggestion by this writer is to engage in <u>empirical</u> research into the non-membership group directly, and of course, this suggestion is a relevant one for reference group theory (or orientation) in general.

<u>Historical Aspects</u>

In a discussion of the non-membership group, it is relevant to give a brief history of the reference group concept as a whole, if only to familiarize the reader with some of the factual material that is known about the concept. Also, another reason would be simply

that the non-membership group concept has been, and most likely is, one of the most non-factual areas in reference group theory (or orientation).

Although the term "reference group" has been very rapidly adopted by sociologists and social psychologists during recent years, there appears to be still considerable disagreement over its definition and use. For instance, Herbert Hyman (1942), who introduced the term, used it in the sense of meaning any group with which the individual compares himself and he also made the distinction between the "membership group" and the "non-membership group." Newcomb (1950) used the term to mean any group with which the individual was identified. In their work on the attitudes of American soldiers, Merton and Kitt (1950) studied the inconsistent statements of individuals by tracking down the specific groups with which they were comparing themselves and the groups to which they wished to belong (non-membership groups). Sherif (1956) wished to restrict the term to groups with which the individual was positively identified, and this was presumably also involved non-membership groups. In a study of spontaneously mentioned reference groups, Keller and Stern (1968) appeared to confine the term to non-membership groups, although they still found that membership references were more numerous, and more important than non-membership references.

Correspondingly, Shibutani (1967) has formulated the idea of the reference group as a perspective. He says that logically any group with which a person is familiar may become a reference group. A reference group becomes any collectivity, real or imagined, envied or despised, whose perspective is assumed by the actor. Shibutani

states that there are three common usages of the concept "reference group", however, the one which would concern the non-membership group is that the group involves the actor aspiring to gain and/or maintain acceptance involving a group. Hughes (1962) has stated that any one of us has certain ready-made "others" by virtue of his birth and the accidents of his schooling and career. However, in an article by Denzin (1966), the idea is stated that Kuhn felt the need to make the distinction between what he called the "social other" and the "significant other." Kuhn (1967) labeled this new category as the "orientational other." There were four attributes of this new category:

1. The term would refer to others to whom the individual is most fully and basically committed emotionally and psychologically.
2. It would refer to the others who have provided the individual with his general category, including his most basic and crucial categories.
3. It would refer to others who have provided and continue to provide an individual with his categories of self and other, and with the meaningful roles to which such assignments refer.
4. It would refer to the others in communication with whom his self-concept is sustained or changed.

Sullivan (1940) coined the term "significant other" to refer to those others whose evaluation of an individual's behavior and attitudes the individual held in high esteem. Although most of the above mentioned sources do not specifically refer to membership or non-membership groups, indeed, these statements could easily be characteristic of

either type group, if only because the non-membership group concept could be included in a general "orientational other" and/or "significant other."

There appears to be a common concern with the way in which groups become meaningful to the individual. Although attention has been concentrated, at least superficially, on whether membership groups or non-membership groups are used as reference groups, it may be stated that such groups have independent norms which can be internalized. The norms of the external group may become the attitudes of the individual. Indeed, Shibutani (1967) has also mentioned that reference groups may arise through the internalization of norms for organizing an individual's behavior. In a modern society special problems may arise from the fact that people sometimes use the standards of groups in which they are not recognized members.

Because of the relatively limited material available concerning direct information on the non-memberhsip group, some speculation will be used together with looking rather indirectly at the non-membership group from direct information on the membership group. Also, an attempt will be made to look at this concept from both the individual, outside of an aspired-to group, and also some theory and empirical study relative to the perceptions of the members of a group toward the perceived individual aspiring or oriented toward that group and its' members.

Specific Research and Implications

Turner (1955) has stated that a group is considered relevant for any given individual if the group's performance is at such a level that the individual that the individual can accept that performance as a standard for judging his own behavior. Also, reference group literature

has not always stressed the extent to which groups are segmentally rather than totally relevant to an individual's values. A standard may serve merely as a level which must be surpassed. However, to think of oneself as "the average" in any group may be regarded as failure no matter what the group or the standard(s)! The measure of adequate achievement may be in exceeding the standard rather than in merely equalling it. With these above comments in mind, we may perhaps be able to see evidence of two concepts involving not only the non-membership group but many types of reference groups. These two concepts would be aspiration and the idea of segmentally influencing reference groups. Many studies, especially those dealing with influences on adolescents, may serve as illustrations of aspiration and segmental influence. In a study by Kandel and Lesser (1969) they report the findings of a rarely quoted study by Riley and others in which it was found that the self expectations which adolescents have for themselves as adults were very close to the adolescents' perceptions of their parents' current expectations. It was found that adolescents often distinguish between values relevant to their current peer relationships and the roles they will play, or presumably expect to play, in the future as adults.

In a study by Brittain (1968), it is stated that reference group theory, as a subdivision of role theory, has as one of its' basic premises the notion that an individual who is faced with a decision will attempt to take the role of reference groups in order to determine what they would expect him to do. Aspiration is perhaps the principle motivating force behind action of this type. Not only would the individual attempt to take the role of what might be called "primary membership others" but also "primary and/or secondary non-membership

others." Indeed, in Brittain's article (1968; p. 412) he states that the reference group used varies, depending upon the nature of the problem.

The general social orientation of adolescents is of a dual character. Reference choices tend to derive meaning from either of two general reference groups, or both: the peer society in which many status and identity needs are immediately gratified, and the larger society in which the status positions, which one can aspire to as an adult, are found. Presumably, these latter status positions are found in what can be termed the non-membership groups of the adolescent. Perhaps studies of this nature may reveal some insight into the nature of conforming patterns of both membership and non-membership groups, and also insight into the level and influence of goal-oriented activity in reference to membership and non-membership groups.

In a study by Sewell and Shah (1968), it was relatively substantiated that parental encouragement was a powerful intervening variable between socioeconomic class background, intelligence level of the child, and his educational aspirations. Sewell and Shah emphasized the need for specifying the variables by which the social class characteristics of individuals are translated into different levels of aspiration. It was also found that presumably family resources exert stronger influences on the college plans of females than on those of males, while ability exerted stronger influence on the college plans of males than on those of females. This may seem to reflect a differential pattern of role expectations from adult males and females in our society. Presumably, these expectations would also be internalized by the individual and therefore aspiration is also necessarily involved in these expectations. College plans would most likely involve the influence of non-membership

groups embodying aspired-to attributes of these individuals. In this study the authors attempted to provide some insight into the phenomenon of social class difference and a segmentally influential variable, parental encouragement, on levels of aspiration toward what could generally be referred to as a non-membership group area, the college environment.

One of the most important aspects in studying the non-membership group appears to be the concept of anticipatory socialization. This concept may be defined as the internalization of norms, values, attitudes, and behavior appropriate to various roles long before actually "taking the role (Mauss, 1969)". In general, these patterns may emerge from extended personal interactions with those others deemed as "significant." However, these anticipatory patterns may involve distortions of perception. Also the anticipatory socialization idea, as it refers to non-membership groups, and aspiration may be enlarged to provide insight into some of the current social structure ends-means activity. The non-membership group may be seen as an integral part of conflict, predominately individual, in society.

In a study by Rogers (1958), behavior of individuals who were within the sphere of two reference norms and groups was investigated. Rogers studied the activities of fraternity and sorority pledges and the anticipatory socialization implications involved in these activities. The pledges were under the influence of the fraternity and sorority actives (the pledges' non-membership group) and the pledges' freshman dormitory residence group (the pledges' membership group). Rogers discovered that the pledges tended to be more associated with that of the dormitory group than that of the fraternity or sorority active mem-

bers. An implication was drawn that this finding may simply be due to proximity and/or age similarity. However, Rogers also speculates that these rather extraneous factors may negate the on-going effects of anticipatory socialization. There is also the theoretical implication that individuals who are located in a situation where the influences from two reference groups operate as cross-pressures appear to compromise, or there is conformity to one of the reference groups, or outright rejection of one group occurs. There may be a psychological and sociological implication here for extraneous variables negating the saliency of both membership and non-membership groups.

In a study by Mauss (1969), it was found that there was unequivocal support to the basic hypothesis that high school students rating high on the Scale of Anticipatory Socialization (Mauss, 1969) toward college were about twice as likely to have used marijuana as those not rating high on the scale. The author's main criteria for the rating was at what level of intensity a high school student associated with students in college. Thus, we may see one implication for the relationship(s) between different primary group influences affecting anticipatory socialization toward non-membership groups.

In a study by Simpson (1955) in which parental influence and anticipatory socialization were related to social mobility, the author found support for studies by Beilin and Wilson that anticipatory socialization into middle class values by middle class peers at school may be the decisive factor in working class boys' occupational aspirations. This may have some implication for a reciprical relationship between social stratification theory and non-membership group influence.

Perhaps the process of anticipatory socialization is a mediating influence in this relationship. For instance, Chapman and Volkmann (1958) have stated that sheer rivalry with another group, whether or not that group is perceived as inferior or superior, may exert a strong motivating force on the level of aspiration.

In a study by McDill and Coleman (1965), high school status was found to be an important source of variation in higher education intentions than were family influences. High status and low status cliques tended to socialize their members into wanting, or not wanting, to attend college. The "elites" of a school accentuated or exemplified the dominant characterizations of the student bodies they represented. Thus, one would expect a different set of socialization effects for students attending a high school in which "college-going" is highly valued, in contrast to one in which it is less emphasized in the social system (of the high school). In this study there seems to be implication for not only socialization influences on members of a group, but also, especially in a high school where there would be competing characteristics in the student body, for individuals wishing to move from one group to another and anticipating the socialization patterns and influences of the aspired-to group(s).

In a study by Turner (1956), he speculates that the socially mobile person must cope with at least two disparate ways of life. An individual may not simply abandon one set of values for another at the time that the transition is made. In a typical transition,' the mobile person will have adopted the level of aspiration as his reference group and accepted its' values as his own (anticipatory socialization) a considerable time before he achieves mobility.

Turner discusses the relationship between the values acquired by the mobile person through anticipatory socialization and the values held by members of his "stratum of destination." Turner states that the values which the individual internalizes because of his positive attraction to the group are not necessarily those which careful investigation would ascribe to the group, but express his image of the group. The individual's image may be distorted by several aspects, including selecting opportunities available to him for observing the group's expression of values. Turner says that this distortion will remain, especially when the mobile person drifts away from early associates without actively repudiating them. Turner distinguishes, in discussing influences of non-membership groups, between the "ceremonial" and "working" aspects of the group. The ceremonial aspect is presented in the formal situations when members are on exhibition and hence are more likely to be observed by members of the out-groups. The working aspect guides behavior which is not under out-group surveillance or constrained by formality. Because of the distortion process the non-member is likely to mistake ceremonial for working values.

Thus, the consequences of failure to distinguish ceremonial from working values is likely to impair the upwardly mobile persons chances of attaining membership that he values. Because of the confusion between ceremonial and working means-values, Turner anticipated that the mobile individual's relationships with members of the non-membership group would become complicated. The individual's expectations based on ceremonial values would meet with disillusionment between actual behavior of the group members

and what he sees as the values of this aspired-to group. Turner says that this condition will often result in ambivalence for the individual and that this has implication for not only reference group theory but also for stratification and mobility theory. Turner says that these findings can be placed in the hypothesized stage of "premarginality" in the theory of the marginal man. Thus, it may be seen that there is real potential for not only individual conflict involving the non-membership group but also some hints at potential conflict between social classes.

It seems that there are also implications in Turner's ideas in regard to perceptual distortion and motivation. It is Turner's idea that perhaps this distorted image of the non-membership group may lead to distortions in motivation, which in turn may lead to further distortion by ego of the aspired-to membership group. Perhaps a good example of Turner's formulations concerns the study by Howard Becker (1957) on becoming a marijuana user. Becker argues that normal and abnormal behavior are acquired in the same way, through a sequence of social experiences during which a person gains a conception of the meaning of the behavior in question and a self-conception that makes the behavior possible. Motivation to engage in a specified type of behavior is learned while practicing the behavior. Thus, the person does not use marijuana because of some previous motivation, he becomes motivated through the use of marijuana (in this instance, perhaps, we see a non-member being able to use a "working value" of a presumably aspired-to group).

Although much of the work done by Merton and Kitt (1950) concentrated on aspects of the concept of "relative deprivation," and it is indeed considered to be classic work on comparative reference groups, it may also deal perhaps rather indirectly with the non-membership group. For instance, although many individuals and their reference groups were studied from a comparison by themselves to others, oftentimes they were comparing themselves with other individuals who were not members of their own group. As an example, individuals in three areas of wartime stations were asked to compare themselves with individuals who were members, like themselves (in the service), but who were not members of their immediate group. It would definitely appear that both membership and non-membership groups may embody norms for an individual, and it also appears that both types of groups also may be considered when one speaks of comparative reference groups. Another classic example of the above is Hyman's study of the "Psychology of Status (1942)."

In a study by Davis (1961), the author studied comparisons made by individuals, in general, to the other members of the student "society" and based many of these comparative findings of individuals' perception of themselves in relation to sub-groups of the student society of which they were not members. For instance, students who were in graduate school would compare themselves to other graduate students; but the latter group were also stipend holders, and thus the former group felt themselves more deprived financially when comparing themselves to the stipend-holder group of which they were not members.

In a study by Larsen and Abu-Laban (1968), two substantiated types of norms, the proscriptive type and the prescriptive type of norm were investigated. However, this study recognized a third type of norm which was called "nonscriptive." Nonscriptive norms incorporate an element of permissiveness, an element of incompleteness of directives for how to act and an element of generality (rather than specificity) of standards. The term "nonscriptive norms" was not to be equated with permissive norms, although the two norms have in common the notion of individual determination of limits (Larsen and Abu-Laban, 1968). Very often it may be these nonscriptive type norms that are involved in an individual's perception of non-membership groups. Because the individual is not a member of the group, and thus the norms of a non-membership group could be in many ways non-scriptive, in this way perhaps it is harder to study the influences of non-membership groups on an individual because the influences may not be either directly observable and/or consciously given importance to, by the individual. The fact that an aspired-to group may have no explicitly "set-up" guide lines for an individual to follow may indeed be an element of attractiveness for the individual, and because the nonscriptive norm has the element of individual determination of limits, perhaps this would be a unique way in which the potential self-directing character of an individual may be brought to the fore. Thus, we have seen how in some instances non-membership groups may involve standardized normative patterns (i.e., like the norms of a membership group), but also may have a less demanding, less structured influence on an individual--and an individual's perception

of influence is not so often restricted.

A Specific Theoretical Approach

A rather unique way of discussing the non-membership group in relation to reference group theory is to look at the perception of the members of an "in-group" toward various types of out-group individuals, who may or may not be aspiring to become members of that "in-group". In an article by Martin Fishbein (1963), he discusses the perception of non-members in relation to certain aspects of Robert Merton's reference group theory (1957).

Robert Merton (1957) says that non-members do not constitute a single homogenous social category. Merton uses three variables in this theory and these are:

1. Eligibility (whether or not an individual is eligible to become a member).
2. Orientation (how an individual views the group, i.e., positively or negatively, or indifferently).
3. Membership (among other things, whether or not the non-member is oriented toward a "closed" or open group). (Fishbein, 1963)

Merton (1957) says a major factor in determining a group member's attitude toward a non-member is whether or not the non-member is perceived as a "threat" to the group; for instance, a threat to reduce the power of the group or threatening the group's norms and values.

Merton (1957) says that the more complete a group is and the more power it has, it will look on the eligible non-member more negatively than the ineligible non-member. The group (in relation

to its' norms) looks at the non-member who was once a member as the greatest threat because that person is a living symbol of the inferiority imputed to the group's values. The group member will tend to be more favorable toward non-members who are positively oriented toward the group, than toward those who are indifferent or negatively oriented. Merton does not consider in his formulation the simultaneous, if any, effects of membership, orientation, and eligibility.

Fishbein formulated five specific hypotheses about the perception of non-members, as derived from Merton's theory:

1. The more the members of an open group perceive a non-member as a "threat" to their group, the more negative will be their attitudes toward him.
2. The members of an open group will perceive eligible, non-members as more of a "threat" than ineligible, non-members.
3. Members of an open group will perceive ex-members as more of a "threat" than non-members.
4. Members of an open group will perceive negatively oriented, non-members as a greater "threat" that neutrally oriented, non-members, who in turn will be perceived as a greater "threat" than positively oriented, non-members.
5. With respect to both perceived "threat" and "attitude," there will be a significant interaction between orientation and eligibility.

Fishbein conducted a test in regard to the above-mentioned hypotheses (1963). In this test, thirty-eight students taking an introductory course in social psychology were asked to rate twelve concepts referring to different types of non-members on fifty-point scales

with the end points of one scale defined as "good or bad," and the other end of the scale defined as a "threat to the group" or "not a threat." (Fishbein, 1963)

The results of this test were the following:

1. Eligibility

   Group members had significantly more favorable attitudes toward eligible than toward ineligible non-members. However, eligibility was seen as the prime determinant of perception of non-members.

2. Orientation

   Orientation was seen to be the most important single determinant with respect to perceived threat of non-members. Orientation was also the most important determinant of attitude scores, in general.

3. Membership

   Group members were not significantly more hostile toward ex-group members than non-group members. Three distinct types of ex-members were discovered: a person who rejected the group, the person who was rejected by the group, and the ex-member who left the group because of "alien" reasons.

4. Interaction between Eligibility and Orientation

   The candidate for membership is perceived as the least threat to the group while the autonomous, non-member was perceived as the greatest threat. A major reversal was noted, however. The marginal person was viewed as even more of a threat than was the antagonistic out-

group member.

Perhaps because the marginal person may have ambivalent feelings toward the group, the group would not know where the marginal person "stood" and his relationship to the group may be largely unknown. Also, the antagonistic non-member was evaluated as more unfavorable than the autonomous non-member. Indeed, members of an open group have a more unfavorable attitude toward the antagonistic non-member than toward <u>any</u> other type of non-member.

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